

TIMEX-SINCLAIR

Sinclair Survival Column

by Mark L. Fendrick

When the QL first appeared, Sinclair Research promised to support it with some sophisticated software in keeping with its intended position as a business computer. In addition to the suite of four programs which came (and still come) with the QL, Sinclair initially licensed a number of packages to be published under the Sinclair label.

While these programs were priced moderately when compared to what was available for the IBM compatibles computers, most Sinclair owners were not willing to pay the prices then being charged for these packages, and then soon were relegated to the dealers back shelves to gather dust.

Now, the dealers who still have these programs are reducing their cost to almost give away levels and are even offering them as part of package deals. We are going to take a look at a few of these early QL offerings for those of you who might be able to pick them up for a true bargain.

Since the QL was envisioned as a business computer, a logical program to have started out with was one which helped the user to start up a new business—one in which the QL would be useful. QL Entrepreneur was that bargain.

As was the case for all of the QL programs published by Sinclair, the packaging was a bit more sophisticated than we had been used to for the ZX-81 or Spectrum software. These programs came in a three ring binder, with extensive documentation. The microdrive cartridge still resided in the

black booklet in which Sinclair used to package its blank cassettes which, in turn, slipped into its own holder within the binder. The binder itself then fit into a hard plastic case which could be put onto a bookshelf when the program was stored away.

QL Entrepreneur was designed as a means to provide the user with the facilities to perform a detailed financial analysis of his business plans. Those unfamiliar with accounting techniques and procedures are taken in hand and guided through this sometimes confusing topic.

QL Entrepreneur comes with three program microdrives, the first of which you should check into being the one marked TEACHING. This teaching program is designed to give you a complete understanding of the concepts required to analyze a business set up. The tutorial included on this microdrive cartridge is designed not simply as a guide to using the applications of this particular software, but to give you the ability to understand and interpret what the results of the applications represent.

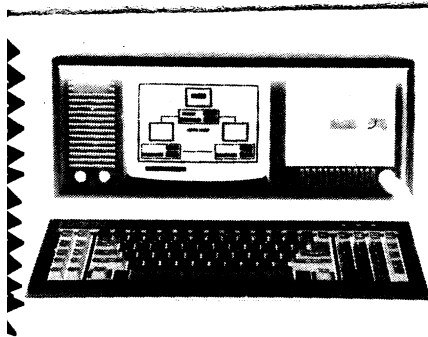
The documentation for QL Entrepreneur contains eleven chapters and six appendices to help you in determining the feasibility of starting up your new business. One thing you may notice right away in the Table of Contents is Chapter 7 which is entitled Value Added Tax. This will tip you off right away that this is indeed British software originally intended for the British business needs. You will need to keep this in mind only once in a

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ware
 lows software
 OS 3.3 w/ GW BASIC

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oe Backup (Installed)	\$595
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Controller, 2088 Bridgeboard, and internal disk drives are products of Commodore Business Machines, Inc., 1200 Wilson Drive, West Chester, Pennsylvania 19380. The Compute! AmigaDOS guide is available at bookstores which carry computer books and magazines. ●

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while during the implementation of this program, since the basic financial considerations are universal. You should be aware, however, that the examples are all shown using the British pound (L).

Once you start using the teaching program, you will find that the choices on the menu correspond to the chapters in the users guide; Using Numbers, The Balance Sheet, Making a Profit, Having Enough Cash, Value Added Tax and Balance Sheet Display. Once you select one of these topics, you will be prompted to return to the text on this subject where examples are given for you to follow along and see how they affect your plans.

Once you have gone through the teaching program and feel that you have an understanding of the necessary procedures in analyzing your business plans, you are now ready to actually start using the program and inputting the data applicable to your particular situation. The two program cartridges in the folder are for single or multiple product applications. You select the one which describes your intended venture and proceed. The QL Entrepreneur will ask you for detailed information about the financial aspects of your business. From this information it will produce monthly cash flow forecasts, year end balance sheet, profit and loss account and an analysis of the results.

Once running, the program is divided into three windows, each serving as either an informational display or a work area. Although there is a large

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amount of data required for the program to operate, this information is necessary to the proper planning of any business. In addition, this information will be necessary when applying for a business loan, so you might as well gather it together early in the procedure. You can stop and save your data at any point and resume your work at a later time. Your data is saved to another microdrive cartridge (the default is mdv2_) although you can define any other device if it is available.

For the individual who is thinking about starting a new business, QL Entrepreneur might just turn out to be the best investment with which to start.

A second in the original Sinclair QL line of software is QL Project Planner. This is a program which is designed to break any project down into its component parts in order to see which tasks are critical and which are not. This program is designed to help the user to work out how long a project will take and the correct order in which to complete the tasks.

Project Planner is based upon Critical Path Analysis which involves dividing a complex but clearly defined project into a series of component actions. (This type of procedure is not designed for the type of situation which involves a great deal of uncertainty or indeterminate cost.) An important feature of the analysis is the ability to dissect and reassemble the project in different ways to maximize the completion of the project. Analyzing your projects in this manner is called Critical Path Management.

Critical Path Analysis can be defined as six steps starting with the disassembly of the project and leading through to the final timetable. These six steps are defined as follows:

Project Structure—Divide the project into easily handled component parts; determine the relationships between the parts and draw a diagram of those relationships.

Overall Duration—Apply the first

is examined and a Critical Path Analysis is performed.

The first thing necessary is to determine the individual tasks involved and the amount of time they require. That looks something like this;

1 Arrange a source of finance	6 weeks
2 Engage the staff	4 weeks
3 Find a location	8 weeks
4 Purchase a stock of books	5 weeks
5 Install the fixtures	4 weeks
6 Prepare an advertising campaign	8 weeks
7 Stock the shop	2 weeks
8 The grand opening	1 week

You will notice that if each of these tasks were to be done consecutively, with no overlapping, the entire project of opening this bookstore would be 38 weeks, but that is not necessary as some of these tasks can be performed at the same time as others. Therefore the computer will now want to know which tasks (or activities as they are called) depend on the completion of others before it can be performed (prerequisites).

1 Arrange a source of finance	No prerequisites
2 Engage the staff	1
3 Find a location	1
4 Purchase a stock of books	1
5 Install the fixtures	1 and 3
6 Prepare an advertising campaign	1, 3 and 4
7 Stock the shop	1, 2, 3, 4 and 5
8 The grand opening	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7

Notice that some prerequisites have in themselves prerequisites, so that in the case of activity number 5 in which the prerequisites are 1 and 3, activity 3 already has activity 1 as a precondition, so it is only necessary to specify activity number 3 as the precondition. Therefore activities number 5 through 8 could be simplified to show the following:

5 Install the fixtures	3
6 Prepare an advertising campaign	3 and 4
7 Stock the shop	2, 4 and 5
8 The grand opening	6 and 7

Next, the QL will be used as a drawing board to diagram the relationship between the various tasks and their interrelation with each other. The first entry onto this visual representation is the activity which has no prerequisites.

tasks are critical and which are not. This program is designed to help the user to work out how long a project will take and the correct order in which to complete the tasks.

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Project Structure—Divide the project into easily handled component parts; determine the relationships between the parts and draw a diagram of those relationships.

Overall Duration—Apply the first stage of the Critical Path Analysis calculation to determine the length of time that the project will take.

Critical Path—Apply the second stage of the Critical Path Analysis calculation to identify the key elements of the project which are used in determining the overall duration.

Spare Time—Review the project to find which components have freedom to be extended or delayed.

Balance—Rework the links between the project components to take maximum advantage of any spare time.

Presentation—Produce a Bar Chart with which you can communicate the final sequence and schedule of the project to others.

As with the previous program, QL Project Planner also comes with a tutorial on microdrive cartridge. In addition to working various portions of the users' guide interactively, the tutorial contains a fully worked example so that you can see how this operation works. In our imaginary scenario, the project of opening a new bookshop

	prerequisites
2 Engage the staff	1
3 Find a location	1
4 Purchase a stock of books	1
5 Install the fixtures	1 and 3
6 Prepare an advertising campaign	1, 3 and 4
7 Stock the shop	1, 2, 3, 4 and 5
8 The grand opening	1, 2, 3, 4, 5 6 and 7

Notice that some prerequisites have in themselves prerequisites, so that in the case of activity number 5 in which the prerequisites are 1 and 3, activity 3 already has activity 1 as a precondition, so it is only necessary to specify activity number 3 as the precondition. Therefore activities number 5 through 8 could be simplified to show the following:

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Next, the QL will be used as a drawing board to diagram the relationship between the various tasks and their interrelation with each other. The first entry onto this visual representation is the activity which has no prerequisites. You proceed in this manner identifying the activities which have their prerequisites already onscreen.

Once this is done, you are next prompted to enter the timeframes involved in each activity. In the case we are given as an example, the unit of time is the week, but it might just as easily be expressed in other units which represent the timeframe of the particular project being analyzed. Beginning and ending times are now computed by seeing when the first possible starting time for each activity exists. This is determined by the completion of all prerequisites. In this manner we see which activities can be carried out simultaneously. Our projected bookshop opening, which originally seemed to require 38 weeks to bring about now shows that it only needs 23 weeks. This represents a savings of 15 weeks over our original estimate, with nothing left out!

Not only are the earliest start times determined in this manner, but the

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latest start times are determined at the same time as well. The program will now determine the Float of the activity. This is the amount of spare time available to perform that particular job. Those activities which have a zero float are the critical activities and must be performed on time or the entire project will be delayed. The lines connecting these activities are now highlighted and this becomes the Critical Path.

Once completed you can produce a number of different reports.

Units—This will list all of the vital data about your project in time units. All time units are measured from the start of the project, at time 0.

DATES—This will derive calendar dates for the earliest and latest start times and the earliest and latest finish times.

T/COST—If you have entered costs against each activity, this option will display the total cost of the project.

HOLS—This option will list all holidays which you have defined (if you have defined such) earlier in the program.

MSTONE—will list all start and end milestones previously defined. These milestones will be listed against the earliest start and earliest finish for each activity.

You may also make printed copies of all of the information produced by this program.

SPEC—will print the specification sheet and holiday details and all milestone details.

LIST—will produce a complete list of the project activities, their durations, prerequisites and costs.

CHART—will produce a copy of the complete bar chart. I will be this chart that you will usually use to

monitor your project and to display it to others.

UNIT—will print the report of each activity with the duration, early and late start dates and finishes and all float details shown in time units.

DATES—will print the early and late start and finish dates of each activity.

QL Project Planner may just be the tool you require in order to get the most out of your valuable time.

These programs—along with others we will look at in months to come—still exist although you may have to check with a few dealers to find them. They are available now at a greatly discounted price as compared with their original retails, making them more of a bargain than ever before. (If you cannot find a dealer who has stock on these programs, drop me a note in care of *Computer Shopper* and enclose a SASE.) ●
